

Looking back on 2014

 By [Jaco Pienaar](#)

17 Dec 2014

Following the passing of Nelson Mandela, the local news cycle started the year on a sombre note. Despite this, there have been many fascinating trends and issues taking place that have shaped the South African media landscape. In our annual year in review wrap, we take a look at some of them.

Citizen journalism

From a social networking front, two of the most significant events were the trials of Pistorius and Dewani. These reinforced the level of influence that social has in the court of public opinion. While 'trolls' have been around since the start of forums and commenting systems, the extreme sentiment between opposing camps in both trials showed that people are no longer hiding behind anonymity. For better or worse, they are pushing for what they believe in even if it means prejudicing them against their peers. This is clearly not going away anytime soon.

This is also impacting citizen journalism. In many respects, it has come into its own in South Africa this year. With community media going on a digitisation path, the number of influencers being relied on for 'reporting' from their areas of interest have grown significantly. With smartphones becoming more affordable to a broader cross-section of society and mobile data rates being more competitive than ever, the citizen journalist net is only going to grow in the coming months.



Shao-Chun Wang via [123RF](#)

One of the spin-offs of this is an increased consumer awareness of their ability to impact brand equity and the online reputation of companies. There is always going to be those who exploit it but, in general, 2014 saw people using their Twitter and Facebook feeds as well as personal blogs to champion various rights. Sure, it might be something as trivial as getting a refund on a salad containing a frog but significant scope for growth has been shown. Think about fracking, gender equality, infrastructure challenges, and the like. More South Africans have begun to feel empowered to start pushing back against the entities that do not give them what they want.

A question of privacy

All of this have contributed to an acute awareness that privacy as South Africans once knew about it does not exist any longer. The connected world is just that. If you have an online profile or do any amount of business on the internet, then and will know about your likes and dislikes. This is certainly unsettling for some but for others this pervasiveness of information and access to it have become a boon.

But for all the benefits of having everything at the tip of your fingers, a degree of caution is required. Consider the recent celebrity photo leak and the impact it has had on cloud security and its associated awareness. It appears that just as soon as comfort levels were established around having your data in the cloud then something happened to set it a few steps back. However, irrespective of the platform used, security will always be tightened and leaks will always happen. Just ask a certain mister Snowden.

One thing is for certain, 2015 is going to bring about even more excitement in the online space for South Africans and how they consume media. Newspapers, magazines, and other channels of information will have to fight hard for attention. This can only mean good things for consumers as competition will drive innovation and better offerings.

ABOUT JACO PIENAAR

Jaco is an MA Information Science graduate who specialises in research, analytical framework development, and content analysis. His thesis was on Intellectual Capital measurement and he applies this to his framework developments as well as knowledge strategies. Professionally, Jaco has worked in the journalism field, academic environment, multi-national research environment, and media analysis environment. He is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Professional Evaluation and Research.

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